



Testimony Re: H-7371 – Zoning Ordinances for Licensed Family Child Care
House Municipal Government & Housing Committee
February 11, 2026
Leanne Barrett, Director of Early Childhood Policy & Strategy

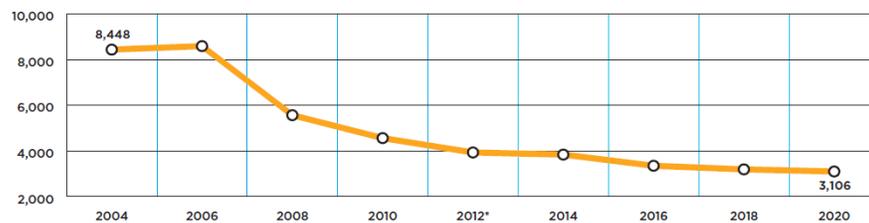
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports H-7371, Rep. Shallcross Smith’s bill to remove zoning rules that restrict the size of licensed family child care programs.

Family child care, or paid child care that takes place in the home of a licensed provider, is an essential part of the child care and early learning system in Rhode Island and nationally.

Family child care offers a home-based setting in residential neighborhoods with mixed-age groups where siblings can interact and be together. These programs often charge lower tuition than centers and have more flexible and responsive schedules with extended hours available. Families often seek out family child care because they want to find a caregiver and educator who can become a trusted and consistent person in the child’s and family’s life over many years. Many family child care providers run programs that prioritize communication and education in children’s native language(s) and offer food, activities, and celebrations that reflect the culture of families in the neighborhood.

Since 2005, the number of licensed family child care programs and slots in Rhode Island has fallen by 63%. The rate of decline is in line with national trends. Due to long working hours, isolation, low hourly earnings (often below minimum wage), no benefits, and financing challenges about half of the licensed family child care homes across the U.S. have closed.

FAMILY CHILD CARE PROGRAM CAPACITY, RHODE ISLAND, 2004-2020



Source: Options for Working Parents, 2004-2006. Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, 2008-2018. Rhode Island Department of Human Services, 2020. RI Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS), 2016-2020. *In the 2013 Factbook, data was collected as of January 2013, instead of December 2012.

Removing local city and town zoning restrictions would allow family child care providers to serve up to 12 children within existing state child care regulations, would help alleviate the shortage of child care in some parts of

the state, and would hopefully make family child care programs more financially viable. It is possible some larger family child care homes could specialize and become RI Pre-K providers or Head Start partner sites, providing more high-quality early learning options.

Family child care providers would still need to meet existing standards for square footage per child and staffing levels. One or two full-time assistants are required to serve 7 to 12 children, depending on the number of infants under 18 months. One full-time assistant is required to serve 4 infants under 18 months and two are required to serve 6 children under 18 months.

A [growing number of states are enacting legislation](#) that helps ensure the availability and sustainability of family child care programs.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.